

St. Louis Judge Balked At Testifying, Report Says

By Gerald M. Boyd

Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — St. Louis Judge Murray R. Randall attempted to avoid testifying before a special House committee on assassinations, arguing that the appearance would have no value and could damage his re-election chances, a report released today says.

Randall's reluctance to be a witness was disclosed in the final report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The committee examined the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Randall had been sought as a witness in the investigation of the "St. Louis conspiracy," in which several Missourians were said to have offered \$50,000 to kill King. One who said he received the offer was Russell G. Byers, a St. Louis automobile parts dealer. Byers said he told Randall of the offer before Randall was made a judge.

The House report says Randall spoke to staff counsel, committee investigators, the chairman of the committee and another member of Congress in an attempt to avoid testifying.

"When Randall... learned that he might be subpoenaed to testify before the committee in public

session he attempted to avoid an appearance, arguing that his testimony would be of no value and expressing concern over the effect the publicity could have on his re-election to the bench," the report said.

When the judge finally appeared before the committee last November, his testimony raised serious doubts on the validity of Byers report, the document said.

Randall said that Byers could have concocted the payment story and then used it to determine whether anyone he told it to was an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Byers had made the claims to an informant and they were passed on to the FBI. An FBI memorandum detailing the information was mislaid and went undisturbed for four years. Finally being discovered last year during an FBI review of Byers' file.

The committee report speculates that Randall offered the theory about the informant to "undermine (his) own testimony in order to discourage the committee from compiling his public appearance."

The committee also concludes that Randall erred when he testified that he had spoken only once to Byers. The committee says that Byers was accurate in saying there had been two conversations.

King Report Mentions Imperial Man

By Gerald M. Boyd

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WASHINGTON — A segregationist lawyer from Imperial, Mo., probably inspired James Earl Ray to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a House committee has concluded, although it could not directly link the Missourian to Ray.

The report, made public today by the Select Committee on Assassinations, confirmed the chief conclusion of other investigations — that James Earl Ray fired the single rifle shot that killed King in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968.

But the report also concludes that the King assassination and that of President John F. Kennedy were the result of separate conspiracies. The committee said it had been unable to discover a direct link between Ray and the Imperial man who the committee said had offered \$50,000 to kill King. Nevertheless, the committee believed a conspiracy existed.

The most plausible link, it said, was a tavern in south St. Louis, called the Grapevine, owned in early 1968 by John Larry Ray, brother of James Earl Ray. The tavern, in the 1800 block of Arsenal Street, was used as a local distribution point for literature and other

paraphernalia related to Alabama Gov. George Wallace's 1968 presidential campaign.

The report said the tavern was the likely place that John Larry Ray first learned that an Imperial man had made the offer. The man, the committee believed, was John H. Sutherland, a St. Louis patent lawyer who had been active in the Wallace campaign and in the White Citizens Council.

One home, used as a Wallace headquarters, was only about 100 feet from John Ray's tavern. Viola Anderson, now dead, lived in the home. But the report also concludes that the Ray assassination and that of President John F. Kennedy were the result of separate conspiracies. The committee said it had been unable to discover a direct link between Ray and the Imperial man who the committee said had offered \$50,000 to kill King. Nevertheless, the committee believed a conspiracy existed.

The report says: "In the South Side area, race relations and the civil rights movement were subjects of daily and increasingly polarized debates. And on the national scene, King was conducting highly visible campaigns against such issues as poverty and the Vietnam War."

"The committee found it reasonable to believe that with an increase in the intensity of the St. Louis American Independent Party campaign effort, and

the heightened visibility of Dr. King, discussion of the Sutherland offer could well have come to James Ray's attention," the report said.

"This possibility was only strengthened by Sutherland's heavy involvement in American Independent Party effort in St. Louis."

The primary evidence that Sutherland was involved is the testimony of Russell G. Byers, a Rock Hill man who says Sutherland offered him \$50,000 to kill King. Byers said that an Imperial friend, John R. Kauffmann, had taken him to Sutherland's house, where the offer was made, but turned down.

The committee discussed other possible links between Sutherland and Ray, which it said were plausible, but less likely than the Grapevine connection.

— That an offer might have reached James Earl Ray through John Paul Spica, who then was serving time with Ray in the Missouri State Penitentiary

and was Byers' brother-in-law. The report said there was no evidence to contradict denials by Byers and Spica.

— That a medical officer at the prison, Dr. Hugh Maxey, might have passed on the offer. Maxey was a friend of Kauffmann and had contact with Ray, who worked at the prison hospital. The report said that no evidence, however, could be found that Kauffmann and Maxey discussed criminal activities.

— That an employee at the Grapevine, Naomi Regazzi, was the link. Mrs. Regazzi's husband knew Spica and Byers and thus could have mentioned the payment. The committee said it did not believe that the man, Robert Regazzi, knew of the offer or passed information on to his wife.

The committee, conceding that only circumstantial evidence was developed, said, "It is unfortunate that this information was not developed in 1968, when the principals were still alive and witnesses' memories were more precise."